Consumer – Frequently Asked Questions

Meningococcal B Immunisation Program

What is the program?
The State Government funded Meningococcal B (MenB) Immunisation Program commenced on 1 October 2018 and provides free meningococcal B vaccinations for eligible children and young people in South Australia.

Why has this program been introduced?
South Australia has the highest rate of meningococcal B disease in Australia. Young children, particularly those less than 2 years of age, have the highest incidence of invasive meningococcal B disease. The second highest at risk group are those aged between 15 and 20 years. Meningococcal B vaccine is recommended for these age groups as they are at increased risk of invasive meningococcal B disease.

Who is eligible for the program?
To be eligible for the program, children and young people must be residents of South Australia, have a Medicare card and be within the age groups below:

- The ongoing childhood program is offered to those aged 6 weeks to 12 months.
- A childhood catch-up program is available for those who were aged from 12 months to less than 4 years of age at the commencement of the program on 1 October 2018. The childhood catch-up program will end on 31 December 2019.
- The young person’s program will begin on 1 February 2019.
  - Students in Years 10 and 11 will be offered vaccination as part of the 2019 School Immunisation Program. The Year 10 program will be ongoing. The catch-up program for Year 11 students will end on 31 December 2019.
  - The catch-up program for those aged 17 to less than 21 will be available from their usual immunisation provider. This catch-up program will end 31 December 2019.

How many doses of vaccine are needed?

- **All children up to 12 months** of age receive 3 doses of Bexsero® (GlaxoSmithKline) vaccine (2 primary doses and a booster dose).
- **All those from 12 months** of age receive 2 doses of vaccine.
- A minimal interval of 2 months is needed between all primary doses

Your immunisation provider should report all Bexsero doses administered to the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR).

Can my baby have the Bexsero with the other scheduled vaccines?
Yes, Bexsero can be safely administered with other National Immunisation Program (NIP) vaccines, but in a different limb to other vaccines. Your immunisation provider will explain how multiple vaccines can be given in the same visit.

You do not need to wait for the usual schedule points to start the course. For example if your child is 5 months old, they can start the course now and receive 3 doses of vaccine in total.
What if my child turned 4 years of age after 1 October 2018? Can they still have the free vaccine?

If your child had not yet turned 4 years of age at the start of the program on 1 October 2018 they are eligible to have the free course meningococcal B vaccines as part of the catch up program which is available until 31 December 2019.

I paid for one or more doses of Bexsero on a private script. Can my child have the rest of the course for free?

Yes. All those in the eligible age groups can receive free vaccine/s to complete their course. Take any immunisation records you have to your immunisation provider. Your immunisation provider will discuss with you how many doses are needed to complete the course.

You cannot be refunded for the dose/s you paid for privately.

What if my teenager was involved in the Meningococcal B Vaccine Herd Immunity Study – B Part of It?

Individuals in Years 10, 11 and 12 in 2017 and 2018 may have already had the meningococcal B vaccination through the Meningococcal B Vaccine Herd Immunity Study–“B Part of It”. If your teenager received the recommended 2 doses through the study, no further doses are required.

If you are unsure how many doses may have been given, contact the study immunisation provider for a record of immunisation.

Will the meningococcal B vaccine be included as part of the immunisation requirements for Family Assistance Payments?

No. This is a State Government funded vaccine and is not part of the National Immunisation Program. This means it is not assessed as part of the immunisation requirements for Family Assistance Payments.

Is the vaccine safe?

Yes. All vaccines used in Australia have been extensively tested for safety. Before any vaccine can be used in Australia it must be licensed by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). The TGA uses scientific evidence on each vaccine to assess safety and effectiveness. Bexsero can be safely administered with other scheduled childhood vaccines.

Can Bexsero be given in pregnancy?

Bexsero vaccine is not routinely recommended for pregnant or breastfeeding women. Bexsero can be given if your doctor recommends it. This may be if you are at particular risk of meningococcal B disease. Relevant age groups will be asked if they are pregnant before receiving the vaccine.

Why is paracetamol recommended for children less than 2 years of age before and after receiving Bexsero?

Fever is a common reaction following any vaccine, but it is more common with Bexsero. Paracetamol will reduce the likelihood of high-grade fever for children less than 2 years of age.

It is recommended that parents/carers give children the first dose of paracetamol 30 minutes before immunisation, or as soon as practicable after the vaccine is given.

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After vaccination it is also recommended that a further 2 doses of paracetamol are given 6 hours apart, even if the child does not have a fever.

If a child develops a fever which is not adequately controlled using these recommendations, refer to the dosing schedule on the paracetamol bottle or seek medical advice.

What are other common side effects following Bexsero?
In addition to fever, other common side effects following Bexsero include:
- pain, redness, swelling or nodule (small hard lump) at the injection site
- irritability
- sleepiness
- unusual crying and change in appetite
- headache and malaise (more commonly reported among adolescents and adults).

Paracetamol will assist in managing these reactions.

Your immunisation provider will explain the commonly expected reactions and give you the After Vaccination Information leaflet following vaccination for further information.

What if I am concerned about any side effects?
If you are concerned, seek further advice from your doctor or immunisation provider, or phone the SA Health Immunisation Section on 1300 232 272 Monday to Friday 8.30am to 5.00pm. After these hours contact healthdirect Australia on 1800 022 222. Further information is also available under Vaccine Safety on the SA Health website www.sahealth.sa.gov.au

Where can I go to be immunised?
The childhood program is available through GPs, local government immunisation clinics, Aboriginal Health Services, Child and Family Health Services (CaFHS), Country Health SA Local Health Network (CHSALHN) and the Women’s and Children’s Health Network (WCHN).

Year 10 and 11 students will be offered the vaccine through the School Immunisation Program. The catch-up program for those aged 17 to less than 21 can be accessed through your usual immunisation provider from 1 February 2019.

Where can I get further information?
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/immunisation

For more information
Immunisation Section
Communicable Disease Control Branch
PO Box 6 Rundle Mall SA 5000
Telephone: 1300 232 272
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/immunisation